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### Manifesto Check: Labour fails to see sport and physical activity as crucial public services

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# THE CONVERSATION

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## Manifesto Check: Labour fails to see sport and physical activity as crucial public services

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Bend it like Miliband. Stefan Rousseau/PA

At first glance, Labour's sports policy is at best marginal, with the text on sport and physical activity amounting to half a page. But the manifesto leaves some levers for any minister holding a sport, health, educational or international development brief within their portfolio, and evidence tells us that sport could make a contribution to every section of the manifesto.

The manifesto focuses on four areas: physical activity for health, organised school sport and two actions around football. No new spending pledges are evident.

### Helping grassroots grow

The 2014 football deal £5.1 billion BT/SKY deal in 2014 earmarked 5% of net domestic rights for grassroots development. The English Premier League is one of the **five wealthiest football leagues in world**. The explosion of revenue – should it be available to any incoming sports or culture minister to redistribute – is eye-catching.

But does 5% mean £400 million or £168 million? The Premier League maintains the 5%

applies to domestic broadcasting income and not to overseas rights deals. Under the current deal, it would distribute £168 million. Analysis suggests that if the 5% tariff was applied to the total income, the figure is £400 million.

Football is in decline in terms of broad base participation, so funding is needed at the grassroots level. In the most recent **Active People Survey 8**, the largest survey of sport and active recreation carried out in Europe, football presented further declines in participation. The number of 16 to 25-year-olds doing 30 minutes of moderate football has declined in 2013/14 compared to the first survey, which was undertaken in 2005/06.

## Gaps remain open

In Labour's 2015 manifesto, the governance of English football comes under scrutiny. Labour promises to legislate for powers to appoint two representatives for supporters to the board of every football club. But evidence from a report funded by the Scottish Government suggested that a one-size fits all solution should be not followed.

In its manifesto, Labour states that the UK's football clubs are "more than just businesses". Yet the party could do more to address the issue of **wealthy oligarchs running clubs**. For example, at Barcelona FC, the members – called "socios" – are able to **democratically elect** the president of the club.

Labour's manifesto pledges to promote the living wage, by providing tax rebates to firms that pay it. Questions about minimum and or living wages affects sport, as neither football or sport could function without a network of workers. Chelsea in England, and Hearts in Scotland are two of four clubs signed up to the living wage, and the Chief Executive of the English Premier League has commented that he was "**not uncomfortable**" with clubs paying some players "half a million pounds a week" while other employees earn below the living wage.

It seems that Labour has missed an opportunity to get a message and a pledge across about closing the gap between the rich and the less well off. Rather than just promoting the living wage, the explosion of football riches could be used to ensure the minimum wage, and increase the number of football clubs offering a living wage.

## Sport as a social glue

The manifesto is strong on the need to protect public services. Labour frame discussions on the role of physical activity in relation to health and reducing inactivity levels.

At least two hours of organised school sport every week is promised. But the manifesto is silent on the gulf in provision between school sport facilities and curriculum time in the state and private sectors.

**In France**, 14% of school curriculum time is given to physical education and sport, compared to 10% in the UK.

But sports also help with developing social networks. This and a sense of community and belonging have an influence on people's health. Sport is part of the social glue that can help with a sense of community. To give everybody the chance to experience the very best of what sporting culture has to offer will not happen by accident.

Despite pledging to spend 0.7% of GDP on international development there is nothing on the role that sport has to play not just in international development but winning friends for the

UK. Since 2003 the United Nations has increasingly used sport as a development tool. Norway, for example, does this through the advent of the annual Norway Cup.

## An elitist approach

There is something elitist about Labours approach to culture. The manifesto endorses the Human Rights Act, prioritises the universal human right to art and culture, but ignores the UN declared human right to sport and physical activity and fails to acknowledge that sport is part of culture. To champion free access to museums and not swimming pools remains not just a funding challenge, but more importantly an ideological one.

For example, given the commitment to eliminate extreme poverty, the manifesto could acknowledge The Homeless World Cup, which pledges to take 10 million out of poverty.

This manifesto would be stronger if it viewed sport and physical activity as crucial public services, part of British culture and an avenue of international development. Sport is one of many spaces that we hold in common and which we can and should be able to share as equals.

*The Conversation's Manifesto Check deploys academic expertise to scrutinise the parties' plans.*